

Section 3
Committee Meetings

3.1 Committee Meetings

In this section we will explore:

- why meetings are important
- how to ensure that meetings have a clear purpose and agenda
- how to identify the relevant people who should attend meetings
- how to manage meetings more effectively
- how to get everyone involved in meeting discussions
- how to give members responsibilities at meetings
- how to properly record meetings through proper agenda setting and minute taking
- Understand the purpose of Standing Orders

It should be noted that some of the content of this section is referenced from NICVA's Advice Note 2: Committee Procedures - July 2013 and Advice Note 3: Legal Structures for Voluntary and Community Groups – July 2013. These Advice Notes are an excellent place to review the type of structure most suitable for an organisation.

What is a Committee?

A committee is a mechanism for bringing people together to consider issues and make decisions. The Committee is responsible for governing the organisation in line with its governing document.

The Governing Document

The governing document is the source document from which the committee's powers are derived. It is usually a constitution, trust deed or memorandum and articles of association. The governing document of an organisation usually states:

- The objects of the organisation – that is, what it is established for (also called aims or purposes)
- Who is eligible to apply to become a member of the organisation
- The rights of the members of the organisation
- How the committee is constituted
- How and when general meetings of the whole membership are called, and what business is to be conducted at annual general meetings
- How the finances are to be controlled
- How the governing document can be altered
- How the organisation may be dissolved.

A governing document normally recognises that:

- It is not practical for all the members of a group to run it (except perhaps in a very small group)
- The members' powers are, therefore, delegated to a committee made up of some members, and the committee acts in the name of (on behalf of) all the members
- Some powers are not delegated to a committee, but are held onto by the whole membership, e.g. election of a committee, altering the constitution, deciding to dissolve the organisation
- The committee is answerable to the members meeting together at an annual general meeting or a special general meeting.

Why have Committee Meetings?

A meeting is when at any time two or more people work together to exchange information and / to take action. Webster's Dictionary defines the word 'meeting' as "an act or process of coming together; an assembly for a common purpose". The key word in this definition is "process". Without proper organisation a meeting may become a time-consuming discussion among a group of individuals.

Meetings should have a purpose and they need to be effective. A poorly planned meeting often results in mixed messages among participants, unclear goals and strategies and a random list of things to be done afterwards. Unfortunately the lack of results at one meeting usually leads to yet another time-consuming, non-productive meeting.

People involved in organisations spend much of their time at meetings. This is often the only effective form of communication between the members of a team and it is the forum where discussions take place and decisions are made.

Facilitative leaders spend as much time preparing for a meeting as they spend in the meeting itself. A rule of thumb is to spend one hour preparing for each hour of a meeting.

Why meetings?

- Firstly – they should be a means to an end – agreeing actions amongst members on what and where next against the vision and strategy of the group;
- They should only be held if required;
- Participation of members in discussions;
- Decision making;
- Reporting;
- Review;
- Problem solving; and

In order to make a meeting as effective as possible the meeting organiser should ensure:

- an agenda is prepared in advance. This will ensure that key items are not forgotten and it will help the committee to stay focused
- make sure the meeting is properly chaired and timed. Adding times to the agenda items in consultation with the chair is important. This keeps people focused
- the agenda along with the minutes of the previous meeting and any other relevant papers are circulated prior to the meeting to enable committee members to consider the issues.
- it is important that committee members are required to read papers in advance of meetings – this should be part of the ground rules of the group
- always start on time. If members are unable to attend (or if they intend to be late), they should send their apologies beforehand

- make sure that everyone is seated so that they can see, hear and participate properly
- ensure that newcomers, guest speakers etc. are welcomed and introduced
- if there is an important issue to discuss or a difficult decision to make, ensure that this is done adequately and not deferred, and that all members have their say
- ensure action points are clarified and those responsible for taking action are clear about action to be taken
- make sure that the meeting is minuted, and that minutes are sent to everyone after the meeting

People have strong views about meetings and here is a list of what has been termed the 'deadly sins' of meetings:

How to make meetings more effective

To make meetings more effective groups need to abide by a number of golden rules:

- **Set Ground Rules.** A set of 'ground rules' should be established by which meetings are run i.e. all mobile phones should be switched off or placed on silent, respect the Chairperson's role etc.
- **Concentrate the meeting on a considered and easily understood purpose.** Lack of purpose tends to come about because there are too many purposes within the same meeting. Teams tend to overlap meetings about progress, briefing, problem solving, decision making, planning and ideas generation. As you overlap these types of meeting the purposes become unclear, the number of people increases and time increases. Concentrate a meeting on one or a few purposes / objectives and also state the purpose of the meeting in about five or six words.
- **Hold a meeting only if it is absolutely necessary and important.** Question the habit of meetings because many meetings are, in fact, unnecessary and unjustifiable in terms of people and time devoted to them.
- **Limit people at a meeting to only those who are relevant.** Let the purpose of the meeting justify the people attending. Try not to combine briefing meetings with other types of meetings because participant number increases and confuses the discussion on decisions, problems, risks, etc.
- **Always ensure that your meeting has an agenda.** The agenda must always describe the PURPOSE, describe what is to be discussed, what is to be achieved and what is to be prepared by the participants. It must also state the time of START and FINISH. Always put the IMPORTANT items first and always try to seek to start the meeting with a rapport-building item. Always plan an agenda in advance and circulate it in advance.
- **Always ensure preparation for the meeting** and if you have planned your agenda well and circulated it in advance there can be no excuse for lack of preparation. It can only mean lack of commitment or lack of self-management.
- **Always ensure good time keeping and always publish the START and FINISH times.** It is a good rule for the chairperson to establish in his or her

mind, how much time is to be allowed per agenda item. Keep your time management matched to the priority of the items. The chairperson should never restart a meeting for late arrivals, and always start on time. Try to aim for a 20% reduction in the time of your meetings. This is perfectly feasible and it will make the meetings crisper. Give good notice of meetings.

- **Good chairpersonship is critical to the success of a meeting.** Meetings with effective chairpersonship are superior to meetings which have no chairperson or weak chairpersonship. The chairperson should control the 'HOW' of the meeting as well as making a contribution to the business discussion. Chairpersonship is a skilled job and here are some of the key mistakes of poor chairpersonship:
- **All actions should be clearly stated and agreed.** The function of the meeting is to achieve ACTION. Action minutes must describe WHAT, WHO, WHEN. The chairman must always summarise the action minutes and gain agreement.
- **Set dates for meetings well in advance for the year** if possible and on the same day each month – set a sequence of meetings e.g. last Thursday of the month or first Monday of the quarter

Poor chairmanship of a meeting is:

- Not stopping 'meetings within meetings,
- Not ensuring all participants are contributing
- Not ensuring effective listening
- Not controlling interruptions
- Not summarising agreement, actions and accountability for actions
- Not stating the purpose of the meeting
- Not starting or finishing on time
- Failure to manage conflict between individuals
- Failure to proportion the time spent on high / low priority items
- Not controlling red herrings and discussion **off the point**

Top Tips for Meetings

- Ask yourself if it is really necessary?
- Who should attend?
- Who does what? (e.g. chairperson, secretary)
- Be sure of the purpose or the objective(s) of the meeting
- Always have a clear agenda
- Give good notice and plan enough time to cover the agenda items
- Circulate any important papers to be discussed in advance
- Consider timing – not too long, not too short
- Arrange for appropriate furniture and equipment
- Choose a convenient, accessible location
- Start on time
- Take any other business first – not last on the agenda to enable you to prioritise emerging emergency or other important issues
- The word Agenda comes from the Latin and literally means those things which need to be done!
- You need a "firm hand", a good chairperson

- Set ground rules:
 - only one speaker at a time
 - the chairperson decides who has priority
 - be constructive with criticism
 - everyone must have a say
- Keep an eye on the clock
- Seating arrangements can help people hear, see and encourage contribution
- Encourage all participants to come prepared
- Minutes act as:
 - a prompt to action
 - an aide memoire at the next meeting
 - a record of what has occurred and decisions made
 - a record of who was there (including date, time, place)
 - use minutes to record action points including who will do what, by when.

Summary of what you need for a meeting:

- A set of dates for the year so that people are organised
- An agenda
- Minutes for the last meeting
- Papers for the meeting

Agenda Template

Below is an agenda template. It includes all the basic details one needs to consider when planning a meeting. The template allows you to set your objectives and agenda items and consider the people who you need to attend and actions for the duration within a structure which is time bound.

Committee meeting of xxxxx Community Association		
Date:		
Time:		
Venue:		
Meeting Number: e.g. 2013:04		
Meeting called by:		
Contact details:		
AGENDA		
Objective of meeting: e.g. To agree a date and plan for the AGM and to review and plan activities of the group for the next three months		
Time	What	Who
7.00 pm	1: Apologies	
7.05 pm	2: Conflicts of Interest	
7.10 pm	3: Minutes of previous Meeting (a written record of decisions taken which requires members to agree its accuracy)	
7.15 pm	4: Matters arising from the minutes (if not otherwise on the agenda)	
7.20 pm	4: Items to be discussed (<i>add and change as required</i>)	
7.25 pm	a. Report of activities since last meeting from Secretary, Cub Committees	
7.45 pm	b. Accounts – report from Treasurer	
7.55 pm	c. Planned future activities/ Item of main business – e.g.	
8.15 pm	d. AGM – date and venue to be agreed and annual report	
8.20 pm	5: AOB	
8.30 pm	6: Date, venue and time of next meeting	

3.2 Minute Template

Minutes are a record of a meeting of a local group or organisation. They need to document date of meeting, location of meeting, attendance, apologies received, agreements reached, decisions made and actions to be taken, by whom and by when.

They are a record of who agreed to do what. Minutes also serve to inform committee members who were unable to attend, as well as the rest of the community and other interested parties of what items and business was covered at the meeting.

It is best to have a minute taker at each meeting. This is usually the secretary of the group. It is not easy to take part in discussions and take minutes at the same time, so sometimes it is a good idea to have an independent person, who plays no part in the business of the meeting, to take the minutes.

The minutes should be written up as soon as possible after the meeting while it is still fresh in the mind. They should¹:-

- summarise the proceedings as per the meeting;
- the name of the group should appear at the top of the first page, along with the date, time and the venue;
- include a list of those present with a note of their capacity, for example chairperson, treasurer, co-ordinator. For guest speakers or other guests it should say 'In attendance';
- The notetaker/ secretary is not in charge of the meeting, the chairperson is. Their focus must be on capturing the discussion of the meeting, not on leading the discussion;
- prepare an attendance checklist especially in case the minute taker is not familiar with the group or committee before the start of the meeting;
- list the people who sent apologies;
- include a statement that the minutes of the previous meeting were passed as correct. If not, the corrections to the previous minutes should be included
- follow the agenda headings;
- include a numbered list of actions to be taken and by whom – initials are fine;
- record the decisions taken in a concise third person style for example, 'it was agreed that ...';
- keep your minutes brief and to the point. The minutes of a meeting should be a snapshot of discussions and decisions. Effective minute taking does not mean you are recording every word that was said, this could lead to missing important points
- if any member did not agree with a decision this should be recorded;
- attendees should be given the opportunity to comment on a draft before they are distributed or displayed publicly;
- minutes should not be distributed to the public or displayed publicly before they have been adopted which will normally be at the following meeting;
- Keep all rough notes until the minutes have been approved;
- minutes of the previous meeting should be sent out to committee members in good time along with the agenda and notice of the date, venue and time of the next meeting.

¹ Extracts from: http://www.gcvss.org.uk/connect/support/community_toolkit

Below is a minute template for meetings. All meetings should be minuted and distributed to all who attended as an official record and guide for creating future planned action and responsibility.

Meeting Minutes of xxxxxxxxxxx Association				
Date:		Time:		
Venue:				
Meeting Objective(s):				
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				
Members Present:		Apologies:		
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				
AGENDA ITEM	COMMENTS/ DISCUSSION	ACTIONS (If Any)	WHO	BY WHEN
1:				
2:				
3:				
4:				
Date of next meeting:				
Venue:				
Time:				

3.3 Evaluating Your Meetings

It is important that you evaluate your meetings

Assess your meetings by scoring the following questionnaire and consider some ideas for improvement.

How well do we run our meetings?

How Well Do We Run Our Meetings?	How well We Do This?				
We draw out individual contributions from team members	1	2	3	4	5
We ensure that decisions are made	1	2	3	4	5
Give sufficient notice of forthcoming meetings	1	2	3	4	5
Previous minutes etc. are sent out in advance	1	2	3	4	5
Meetings start on time	1	2	3	4	5
We follow an agenda in meetings	1	2	3	4	5
We have energetic meetings	1	2	3	4	5
Minutes are kept and are formally approved	1	2	3	4	5
We bring in information and experts to help us	1	2	3	4	5
Our Chairperson summarises and clarifies after discussions	1	2	3	4	5
We help out other group members in difficult situations	1	2	3	4	5
We always agree who is responsible for taking action	1	2	3	4	5
We finish our meetings on time	1	2	3	4	5
We hold our meetings in appropriate venues	1	2	3	4	5
We give priority and time to important agenda items	1	2	3	4	5
Our chairman maintains control of 'unhelpful' characters	1	2	3	4	5
We allocate roles or duties	1	2	3	4	5
We set up sub-groups or study groups when required	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Comments/Suggestions for Improvements:</i>					

3.4 Standing Orders²

The rules by which a committee is run are called “Standing Orders”. A model set of Standing Orders set out below. It is *for guidance only* and a group can draw up its own Standing Orders in line with what is written in its own governing document. When agreed, they should not be changed from meeting to meeting.

(Reference: NICVA’s Advice Note 2: Committee Procedures - July 2013).

Model Standing Orders (Rules) for Committees

1) Application, alteration and suspension of Standing Orders

These Standing Orders shall apply at all meetings of the committee and may be changed only:

- When notice of the proposed changes have been given to the Secretary
- Such notice has been sent to all members of the committee
- The proposed changes form part of the agenda of a committee meeting
- The proposed changes have been approved by not less than two-thirds of the total membership of the committee.

The Standing Orders may be suspended at any meeting, but only when not less than two thirds of the members present agree to such suspension.

2) Meetings

2.1 The committee shall meet not less than ... times between one annual general meeting and the next

2.2 The date, time and venue of each meeting shall, as far as possible, be agreed in advance at the first meeting of the committee but, in any case, shall be confirmed at the preceding meeting

2.3 Meetings to consider urgent or special business may be called at the discretion of the Chair or by agreement of the committee

2.4 The Secretary shall give members at least seven days’ notice of all meetings

2.5 A meeting shall not be longer than two hours, except where not less than two-thirds of members present agree to an extension.

3) Chair

3.1 The elected Chair shall normally preside at all meetings of the committee.

3.2 In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair shall preside.

3.3 In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, the members present shall elect a Chair for that meeting only.

3.4 On all matters of interpretation of Standing Orders, the ruling of the Chair shall be final.

² NICVA’s Advice Note 2: Committee Procedures - July 2013.

4) Sub-committees

4.1 The committee may appoint subcommittees, and shall determine their terms of reference, membership and duration.

4.2 Sub-committees may consist of members of the committee and other persons, as the committee so decides.

4.3 All sub-committees shall report to the committee at such intervals and in such manner as the committee decides.

5) Quorum

5.1 The minimum number of members present to allow business to be conducted (quorum) shall be of the total membership of the committee.

6) Voting

6.1 Decisions of the committee shall generally be taken by consensus, unless the Chair considers that:

- a matter is too minor to warrant a lengthy discussion; or
- there is no possibility of agreement; or
- a matter is a procedural matter where voting is prescribed.

6.2 Voting, when appropriate, shall normally be by a show of hands but, at the discretion of the Chair, a ballot vote may be taken.

6.3 When voting occurs, a simple majority except where otherwise prescribed in these Standing Orders, shall be needed for a decision.

6.4 The Chair shall have a personal vote and in the event of a tie, shall have a second or casting vote.

7) Agenda

7.1 The agenda for each meeting shall be prepared by the Secretary following consultation, if required, with the Chair

7.2 Members having items for inclusion in the agenda shall submit them to the Secretary, together with such supporting information as is required, at least two weeks prior to the date of the meeting at which they are to be considered

7.3 The agenda, together with any necessary supporting information, shall be sent to each member at least seven days before a meeting

7.4 Matters not appearing on the agenda may be raised at a meeting, under 'Any Other Business' but then only with the consent of a majority of members present.

8) Conduct of Discussion

8.1 The conduct of meetings of the committee or of its sub-committees shall be regulated by these Standing Orders

8.2 Members shall speak to the meeting only through and with the consent of the Chair

8.3 A member may at any time in the course of discussion:

- (i) Raise a point of order, e.g. that the Standing Orders are not being followed. The Chair shall immediately consider and rule upon the point of order

- (ii) Raise a point of information or clarification. The Chair shall at her/ his discretion deal with the matter immediately, or at the earliest opportunity
- (iii) Propose that the 'question be now put', i.e. that the business under discussion be decided upon without further discussion. If the proposal is seconded and then agreed by a majority of those present, the Chair shall put the business to the meeting for decision

9) Proposals

- 9.1 A formal proposal put to the meeting shall require a proposer and a seconder
- 9.2 A proposer shall be entitled to make a proposed speech and to reply at the end of any discussion on the proposal.
- 9.3 Amendments to a proposal (which may not be direct negatives of the proposal) shall each require a proposer and seconder. Amendments shall be considered in order before continuing debate or discussion on the main proposal.
- 9.4 The proposer of the main proposal may accept an amendment, or may choose to speak against the amendment.
- 9.5 When an amendment is accepted by the meeting, it becomes the main proposal, and is then subject to amendments as above.
- 9.6 When all amendments have been disposed of, discussion of the standing proposal shall continue until a decision is reached.
- 9.7 A member shall not (except as provided in 9.2 above) speak to a proposal more than once, or for longer than three minutes.

10) Attendance of persons not being members of the committee

- 10.1 Such staff as the committee may designate shall normally attend meetings of the committee
- 10.2 Staff in attendance shall have the right to speak but not to vote on any business before the committee, except where the committee considers that attendance by and participation in particular business of staff is not appropriate
- 10.3 Persons not being members of the committee or staff may be invited to attend one or more meetings at the discretion of the committee. Such persons shall have the status of observers without the right to vote.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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All of NICVA's advice notes, as well as the most up to date information about the implementation of company and charity law, can be downloaded from the specialist Governance and Charity Advice section at www.nicva.org.